

This is an interview conducted with Moon Landrieu, Mayor of  
New Orleans, on January 10, 1974, by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries.  
Transcribed by Jean Pruner.

Landrieu: Too fast, too much, too quick. So it's really not impossible  
to put together the kind of coalition that you are talking about and  
I think you're going to see more of that. I think it's going to become  
an economic coalition. And that economic problem which affects poor  
whites and blacks.

(Interruption on tape for phone call.)

The economic thing is what's going to . . . what brings them together.  
I haven't been able to do that. I haven't had enough time.

J.B.: This race moves out of economics because more and more . . .

Landrieu: Oh, I think so. There's not any question.

J.B.: Well, do you think . . . that suggests then you think on a  
statewide basis that a populist coalition is in the making. At least  
a coalition of interests, not necessarily . . .

Landrieu: Right. Yes.

J.B.: Wish we could find another word than coalitionist.

W.D.V.: Not an alliance, either . . .

Landrieu: No.

W.D.V.: . . . because that's something conscious, too.

J.B.: To get back to the hypothesis that some have suggested that  
political power seems to have shifted in the last election from the  
north to the south. And let me go back to Chep Morrison's run for  
governor, that he couldn't make it essentially because he was from  
New Orleans, because he was southern, so, do you think there is a real  
basis for that assertion?

Landrieu: Well, I think it was absolutely true that Chep couldn't make it, but for more reasons than that. He was Catholic. He was "big city." And he was liberal. He would have made it this time. He just . . . and probably would have made it four years before Edwin Edwards did. There's no doubt in my mind except Morrison would have been elected governor four years ago, if he had lived. But all of those barriers are breaking down. Television, education, travel. The world is becoming smaller. New Orleans was a thousand miles from Shreveport 20 years ago. Now we are only 300 miles from Shreveport. It's just that the world is changing and it ain't necessarily terrible to be from New Orleans now. And I think we have more respect for those who, you know, are in the rural section. It ain't so bad to be a Catholic, you know, any more. Racial and religious bigotry, the Kennedy election, and there a thousand things that have changed all that. And while the South has probably been much slower than anyplace else to change, nonetheless, it's not an island and that change has taken place. I don't necessarily think that there is a conscious feeling that, "Gee, this is a south Louisiana guy. Therefore, we ought to elect him." And it's sheer philosophy. That's all. What's the fellow's philosophy? The south has always had a bigger population base than the north. But it's always taken a northern guy to win or a central Louisiana guy to win in the state. And basically because they have always been running, you know, any black. So that you had a, let's say, New Orleans split down the middle, and, you know, we were not, while we're more liberal than the northern part of the state, it would be a mistake to say that this section of the state has been liberal. It hasn't been. It's been conservative in terms of the national standard. But, nonetheless, more liberal so to speak than the northern part of the state. So virtually anybody running here

statewide would have the tag of being, you know, if you were an officeholder, anyway, of being liberal. We have always had a population base. It's just more of a philosophical thing than anything else. In other words, I think that a liberal, say a liberal moderate from the north can win statewide easily.

J.B.: When the term the "Long tradition" is mentioned, what does that mean to you?

Landrieu: It's a populism. The Longs were fascinating. They were for poor whites and poor blacks, for the little man, against the big corporations; they were certainly not racial liberals. They were economic liberals. I think you get into a different kind of, you know, use of the term. You talk about a liberal now, would be, you know, would reflect more in terms of race, how you feel about racial matters. Really, that's been the only criteria in the last ten years. Somebody said you were a liberal or conservative meant did you like blacks or didn't you like the, you know. That's all. You want to give a guy his rights or don't you want to give them to him. And it had nothing to do with economic issues. In all fairness, I think the term as applied to the Longs was . . . they were economic liberals, but racially conservatives.

J.B.: Does that tradition, the Long tradition . . .

Landrieu: Well, I think . . .

J.B.: Well, is it still of importance?

Landrieu:

J.B.: How?

Landrieu:

And is the tradition important or is the philosophy important? I don't think that there is any great strength attached to the Longs, the Long

machine. Although that's a good name, simply because of the name identification. It doesn't hurt. I'm not so sure that it helps, but it doesn't hurt, either. I don't . . . I don't know whether it's a blessing or not to be named Long in a statewide election. It used to be, obviously, at one time, very important. But I think the philosophy is still important and I think it's important because there are a lot of poor people in this state. It's got a lot of poor. There are a lot of have-nots, whites and blacks.

J.B.: Has the image of Louisiana of having higher tolerance of corruption in state government been a hindrance in industrial development?

Landrieu: Apparently so. I'm inclined to think that's . . . that is also a highly exaggerated theory.

J.B.: Could we back up on that? When outside commentators look at this state, they come up with several conclusions. One is that it is a more, much more Catholic than any other southern state, there are more ethnic groups and it has more corruption. And you generally get those three things. We are trying to get an assessment of how people in the state see that. Is this realistic? Is it any different from any other place?

Landrieu: No, I think that's highly exaggerated. I think it's true about the Catholicism and the other points are true. I think the corruption is not true. I'd be inclined to give this state, despite what is thought nationally and what is thought by the press locally, very high marks.

I think there are better states. But in having traveled a little bit, seen some of the political systems across the United States, I'd have to give this city extraordinarily high marks, and not because of my administration. I'm not suggesting that to you at all. I'm just talking about the general level, of ethics and honesty in comparison to other cities. Very high marks.

J.B.: Then why this perception?

Landrieu: I think there is a lingering . . . . First of all, you start with a bad reputation, you know, and it's a . . . the 1930's, the gambling, the corruption of the 'thirties. New Orleans itself has always had a reputation of being a very sinful place. Well, it really sort of makes you laugh when you actually see it. Honest to God, I went out to San Francisco and Los Angeles. Topless shows, bottomless shows, and all, pornography. You just don't find that here. I tell people I've met that there's not been a topless place in the City of New Orleans. Now, call it hypocrisy if you will, you know, in that you got a gal, you know, bumping, grinding on the stage and striptease, but it's almost high camp, you know. I mean, you know, she's got on a G-string and some pasties and stuff, but not raw sex. The same thing is true with respect to gambling. The states now have moved into statewide lotteries, off-track betting; not the state of Louisiana. As a matter of fact, we've about put back into the state constitution once again a prohibition against gambling. In the state constitution. Is there a certain amount of illegal gambling? Yes. But, you know, those are quickie joints, pressed wherever it's found. Narcotics? Tough outlook with respect to narcotics. But it's good writing. The national press expects it to be said of Louisiana and of New Orleans. It's fairly easy to sell the story and it's sold.

J.B.: But the question of tolerance, for example, the idea of an architect paying the apartment rent of a U.S. Senator who is the wife of the governor and you just sort of acknowledge and accept it. Whereas you have the feeling that in many other states there is certainly public outrage at it.

Landrieu: I think there are a lot of people who felt that wasn't proper. But didn't feel it was the kind of thing that you'd hang a man for.

J.B.:

that the Latin temperament is such that you tolerate certain levels of corruption and only when it gets to a certain point you overreact and indict everybody. But at some point when you go over the threshold, then the people react, but they can tolerate a certain . . . they expect you to steal a certain amount, or get certain kinds of privileges and then it's supposed to stop. Talking about statewide traditions.

Landrieu: I think we have less of a tolerance in many instances than what I perceive in other places. Many of my colleagues around this country, actively engaged in business while they are mayor. I don't mean to say that they are engaged in questionable businesses, but I don't quite know how a guy is mayor and engaged in business and not advancing his own interests. Nobody can make me believe that a man can do that. Like the governor going into business, being in the insurance business, or, you know, being an active lawyer, real estate business. It seems impossible for him not to have an advantage.

Impossible. You don't find much of that in this state. I don't think so, anyway. I'm not saying that you don't have thievery taking place, but I'm simply saying that the kind of acceptance of politicians engaged in some kind of a business, it's almost felt that the public officeholder is a public officeholder and you don't do anything else.

J.B.: What's the relationship between the city and state government now in New Orleans as, say, compared to ten or fifteen years ago. Have there been any changes?

Landrieu: Oh, I think it's changed very dramatically. I don't mean to suggest that historically New Orleans and the state have always been separated because during the Long years, Maestri had the city and

Long had the state, the city and state were very close. Well, that division came about in 1946 when Chep Morrison got elected. We knew one period of peace during that time and that was the Kinnon administration. Boggs had run for Governor and lost. Kinnon won and we supported . . . Morrison supported Kinnon in the second primary and he was friendly to the city and there was no open warfare. But starting in 1956, in '48 Earl Long was governor, so we went through four years from '48 to '52 of warfare with Chep Morrison because Morrison and Long politically hated one another. I think personally they may not have felt that way but at least it was to each's advantage to, you know, be the other's opponent and enemy. Kinnon got elected in '52 and so there was a reasonable city-state relationship. But after 1956, Chep again running for mayor at that time and . . . I mean for governor and, if the mayor of the City of New Orleans, which in my judgment, is the second highest political office in the state, decides to run for governor and you lose, it isn't very likely that the winning governor is going to treat the mayor of New Orleans very kindly, having been his opponent. Now, particularly since Chep made it known the day after he lost that he was going to be running again in four years. So it was to that governor's advantage to make New Orleans look as bad as possible and that relationship lasted for about 16 years and hurt the city very badly. I think it's one of the things that doesn't serve Chep very well. You know, I greatly admired him. I am indebted to him and he was a lovely guy, but as I look back at it, his personal ambition to be governor really cost the city very dearly in terms of the state relationship. And the governor really dominates that relationship. I mean the governor decides whether or not New Orleans is going to be part

of the state or whether it isn't. He's got that much power. There is enough latent resentment of New Orleans out there, you know, the "big city," etc., etc., to be surfaced if the governor wants to surface it. But he can also submerge it if he wants to. When McKeithan became governor he was a northern boy and Chep had died and he saw a tremendous political backing here. Decided that he wanted New Orleans, and wanted to be friendly with it, and so he could spread his base, you know. Since Chep was no longer here and was no longer an opponent of his, since he had died . . . and he began to woo New Orleans, did everything in the world for the city, helped us in every which kind of way. And New Orleans responded. And so has Edwin Edwards.

J.B.: Now we have also heard interpretations that McKeithan began to really woo New Orleans before Morrison died.

Landrieu: I don't know how that would have been possible. John McKeithan . . . Chep died in the first term of McKeithan's administration. He died in . . . election was held in November, McKeithan would have been sworn in the first week in May, and Chep died, I think, the third or fourth week of May, as I recall. There wasn't much wooing, you know, not much could have been done. Now, he and Chep had formed something of an alliance. He had asked Chep to, you know, become involved in his administration, not as a paid job, but as sort of the goodwill ambassador for the state, but before any of that could be done, Chep was killed in a plane crash which left a backing in New Orleans and McKeithan very wisely, very appropriately, moved in and built himself a good political base in New Orleans.

J.B.: When you were a freshman representative, you didn't think you'd be a councilman-at-large? You didn't think about the future?

Landrieu: Oh, I did. After I got elected, I, you know, take an unusual guy who, having gotten elected, didn't begin to look at . . . say, "Gee, maybe I've got potential to do something else. Maybe I can be, you know, a councilman." I simply said that when the segregation fight came up, I measured it and said to hell with it, you know. I do what I've got to do. And if I don't ever get elected again, I just don't get elected.

J.B.: Yeah, but now you've been elected, well, with one of the biggest pluralities of any mayor in the country, re-elected. So where do you see yourself going

Landrieu: I don't. I really don't.

J.B.: Don't you think the last re-election kind of opens things up a little more now in terms of southern politics?

Landrieu: I don't think it's a question of opening things up. I have never let myself think about another office. I really have a political philosophy that says if you do what you're doing, do it well. And the minute you begin to think of another office, you begin to shade what you are doing, you become cautious. You begin to make decisions, you know, predicated on that ambition. And somehow or another it affects your performance. And I've got another friend of mine who was just the reverse. I don't mean to say that he is any less sincere than I am, but he charts his whole life out, you know. I am sure that he knows where he is going the next twenty years. Go ask him right now and he'll pull out his chart and tell where he would be. I don't think . . . I've never been successful doing that.

J.B.: What does your friend's chart operate on?

Landrieu: You know, the usual. U.S. Senator, Governor, President of the United States.

J.B.: In that order?

Landrieu: No. I say that facetiously. You know, that's just . . . that's conversation.

J.B.: What effect do you think reapportionment has meant as far as Louisiana politics is concerned?

Landrieu: I don't think it's had a great impact. I think it's done very little.

J.B.: Isn't the city any better off in the legislature now after reapportionment?

Landrieu: No, we're worse off.

J.B.: Worse off?

Landrieu: Worse off, because, first of all, we lost a few votes, which weren't terribly significant. We used to have 20 representatives. Now we have 17. But the urban centers improved their position considerably. When you had reapportionment, south Louisiana gained greater strength because we have more urban centers here, but that didn't mean, as many of us had hoped, that it would help the center cities. It hasn't. It's helped suburbia because that's where the population growth has been. And the center city has no greater opposition than from suburbia, and that's true all across the country. We're inclined to establish a greater relationship with Shreveport and Alexandria, Monroe, you know, our traditional, in quote, "enemies," than we can ever establish with inner city transplants, those who have moved out of the center city into suburbia for racial reasons, either because the land was cheaper

or because they just didn't like the city for one reason or another. Earn their living here, live outside. You know that urban story all over. And so when the issue is raised, they find a greater relationship with the rural people against the center cities.

J.B.: How . . .

W.D.V.: Can I ask him a question about the constitutional convention. We listened yesterday in Baton Rouge to the governor's address to the convention. Do you have any comments about the, I guess, nine points they made in terms of its reforms?

Landrieu: I think most of what he said was very legitimate. I think the convention . . .

W.D.V.: What about his role in relationship to the convention this last year?

Landrieu: Well, it surprised me the way he has done this. I . . . everybody's got a different style. I'm a bit surprised that he has come forward at this point and been as bold and dramatic as he has about it. I think he would have been better off had he been exercising that influence all along. But he's been a remarkably successful guy and I won't know whether he's successful with this or not until it's all over with.

W.D.V.: What do you think of the proposed constitution?

Landrieu: In its present state, I think that they've missed a golden opportunity to draft a fine document. If it is acceptable, it is very marginal at this point, extremely marginal. I'm saddened that it's become bogged down in a lot of political hassling and logrolling, that instead of drafting what would certainly be considered an instrument

that would really permit this state to improve itself, they've, you know, just locked themselves into every old tradition of the state. Three dollar license plate, limit the income tax in the constitution, putting all that minutiae back into it, representing once again a distrust of the legislative process. And that's unfortunate. Perhaps if they do some of the things that he has talked about, maybe it will correct what I think right now is very marginal situation.

J.B.: Do you think Louisiana has suffered from an over-concentration of power in the governor's office?

Landrieu: No. I believe in a very strong executive. I think it's important.

W.D.V.: When you meet with your colleagues in the Mayors' Conference, do you *notice* differences between the problems they have *and your home?*

Landrieu: No, I don't see the problems as very different. Our governmental structures are different. Mayor of this city probably has far greater powers than most any other mayor that I know of, except maybe Chicago. Power, I'm talking about relative power. I just don't put myself in the same political level as Dick Daley or the mayors of the much bigger cities, but from the standpoint of functions of the office, we've got broad powers vested in the mayor of the city. Many of the mayors, for instance, Wes Wise in Dallas, you know, it's really almost a part time job in Dallas, run by, you know, a manager. I think Houston is sort of like that, too, even though it's a full time mayor. I doubt that they have the appointive power. I know Atlanta doesn't unless they have just altered under their new, you know, revision, charter revision.

J.B.: How do you account for the relatively strong showing of basically moderate progressive type candidates on the state level in Louisiana and yet, except for one or two exceptions, a concentration of conservatives in the congressional delegation?

Landrieu: Incompetency is a big factor. I guess that's the only way I can put it. I don't know how to explain it other than the fact the fellow has got the seat and he's got to really do something bad to lose it. Many people in this state I think vote because they like the guy and like his personality, disagree with his philosophy, you know, but measure him in balance and like him. It's pretty hard for a congressman to mess up. Really. Where do you find an issue that is so important to people that they are either going to vote for you or against you on that one issue? Civil rights act, maybe, was one. Maybe, you know, the open housing legislation. And those are the only two that I can think of that were really of any great significance since I've been watching politics. I don't know what is the basis for unseating a guy once he's there.

J.B.: Is there anything you wanted to comment on concerning either Louisiana or New Orleans politics relative to the better understanding of it that we haven't discussed?

Landrieu: No, I don't think so. I think this state is different from Mississippi and Alabama and Georgia. I'm not quite sure how, but I think we are different. I think that difference is most pronounced in the southern part of the state. I think we're coming at it from a little different history than the others. We tend to be, at least I perceive it to be, far more moderate than the other states, though I can't document that, you know, in terms of national elections. Leadership has an awful lot to do with that, I think. Who is governor at what time. Very difficult

to draw conclusions and make them stick over a long period of time. Mississippi can go from a Ross Barnett to a Waller. I'm not so sure that if Ross Barnett came back or a Ross Barnett and got re-elected that the state wouldn't take on the attitudes of the governor. I think the governor of the state or the mayor of a city creates the image of that state and city as much as anything.

W.D.V.: Excuse me, what goals do you still have left to accomplish as mayor?

Landrieu: Oh, gosh. I don't know that we have accomplished anything thus far. I think we've started a lot of things that I would like to see us finish. I would like to break down every vestige of racial and religious prejudice in this city if I could. We've gone a long way to do that. I don't think there are too many other barriers left. I'd like to see the . . . . We haven't succeeded well in the economic field. That's been the toughest of all, to get blacks into the mainstream of economic life. Wherever I've had power to do it by signing my name, I've done it. Just do it, bang! Get it done. But you can't do it just by signing your name in economics. Takes much longer and much tougher. But I think the attitudes here have generally been improved and once the attitude is changed, I think the rest will follow. But some kind of effort is going to have to be made in the economic area. I want to see New Orleans preserved historically. I want to see the downtown section stay strong and viable. And I would like to see the neighborhoods of this community identified and rehabilitated and stabilized. It's a large order. I'm very optimistic about New Orleans. In fact, I'm becoming more optimistic about all of the cities. There has been a general recognition . . .

J.B.:

Landrieu: Right. I think there is a general recognition that the cities are the answer. I've always been given to cyclical approach to most everything. Virtually everything comes full cycle sooner or later. And now I think you're going to see a redevelopment of most of America's cities. And I think that was predictable. You know, they had to get bad before they got better. They are going to get better. Those cities that are doing extremely well now are going to know some hard times in the future. Some cities that are doing very poorly now are going to know some better times. It's . . . well, if you begin to compare, let's take Phoenix and New Orleans. 250 years old and I guess half of the houses are at least 70 years old, if not more. Phoenix is a city 20 years old, so to speak, you know, from its housing style. What is Phoenix going to do in 40 years? And I would suspect that in 40 years, bet you that within 15 or 20 years, you are going to see a vast redevelopment in the inner city of New Orleans. Housing, old housing st , slums be torn down, new developments, just at a time, you know, when other cities are developing slums. Houses . . . life expectancy of a house, 30 years, 40 years, 50 years. We're surely not going to tear it down before it gets so bad that you got to tear it down or put it to some other use. You find that happens with downtown areas, too. Fine Shell Building, beautiful thing. It's just opened up. Tell me what it's going to be in 60 years. Maybe it'll be a slum building in 60 years.

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . people from the politicians in office . . . It's pretty tough.

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . and a more conservative guy would get elected next time.

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . corruption. There have been stories written all over this country about the corruption of the Dome Stadium. There ain't no corruption. You say, why? Well, we've got a political system here that is a tough system and traditionally it's a hard-nosed, attack, slander your opponent kind of a system. I don't know of any state that does any worse than this one. And that, too, lends to the, you know, to the feeling of corruption in this state. Where, man, where else do you find people . . .

J.B.: You mean the inflammatory rhetoric?

Landrieu: Oh, yeah. See, you just tar your opponent. That's an old Long, you know, system. The Longs had a patent on it. Huey Long would say anything about you. I've never met Huey Long in my life but it's just what I've read about him. Talk . . . he'd say anything about you, anywhere, anytime. It didn't have to be true. You just paint your opponent. Earl Long, exactly the same thing. And it's been part of the Louisiana style. Accuse your opponent of being with the Mafia, you know, or accuse him of sleeping with somebody's daughter, sleeping with a black. Anything. And you have that kind of volatile rhetoric and, while nobody here in Louisiana may take it seriously, you know, it creates nationally a pretty bad impression. We sort of had a chuckle watching the Watergate thing, and I'm not saying Watergate is not serious in its deep sense, but the political tricks and watching some of the Senators express amazement that somebody would send a letter to the paper and a letter to the editor that was ghost-written and they would put out leaflets, you know, suggesting the fellow was something less than a decent, fine human being, unsigned. And Louisiana, that's all anybody ever did, you know. Those fellows have got to be kidding.

J.B.: Yeah, but isn't the era of the Jimmie Davises and the Schwegmanns

and so on sort of passing now with television? Because it's pretty tough to be a . . .

(Interruption on tape.)

Landrieu: I've seen debates and fights going on for months and you would have to assume that one guy is going to survive politically and the other guy is going to die . . . Vote on a poll, and people love both guys. They both come out very high. You know, and they think . . .

J.B.: You say politics is almost a preoccupation?

Landrieu: Yeah. They would both come out very high. And the only thing you can say is that the people enjoy the fight. They aren't too caring about who's right or wrong. They . . . it's just a good political fight.

(Interruption on tape.)

. . . highly observant, but I really do think that it's highly exaggerated, you know, corruption in this state, vis-a-vis other states. I just refuse to believe the other states that I have seen are as clean as they purport to be.

W.D.V. Maybe they just don't talk about it.

Landrieu: Huh? I don't know what it is. I really don't.

(End of tape.)

This is an interview with Mayor Moon Landreau of New Orleans, Louisiana. The interview was conducted on January 11, 1974 by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries. The interview was transcribed by Susan Hathaway.

J.B.: The first question that I would like to ask is about the changes in New Orleans politics since 1948 and especially in the sense that New Orleans at least had a reputation at the beginning of that period of probably being, more than any other southern city, as a city of machine politics. I don't mean that necessarily as a majority phrase. To what extent has there been change in New Orleans and what has taken place? What is the situation insofar as the kind of New Orleans politics and how it operates?

Landreau: I don't know if I am really competent to comment on the period prior to 1960, which was the date that I became actively engaged in politics. In any event, with that disclaimer I would then go back, you see, I don't think you can quite measure it from '48, you may be able to do so. But you have to put it in the perspective of what New Orleans was before 1946, which was sort of a turning point for this city.

Prior to 1946, there was a very strong tie between the city administration and the state administration. ~~It~~ was ~~and the Longs and~~ they had sort of dominated the state-city politics. Then, in 1946, Chuck Morrison, a 36 year old reform Governor, returning war Colonel, ran for Mayor and was elected which began 16 years of what you might say was progressive government. I don't mean reform in the sense of . . . in the general sense that it is usually accepted. But nonetheless he was a bright, intelligent, aggressive, good politician. I think it was about that time that the racial attitudes began to change a little bit. I don't suggest that it was anywhere approaching equality, but I think that a definite shift began to take place. It was at that point too, I think, roughly about 1948, if my memory serves correctly, and I was quite young at the time, that blacks began to get registered in any numbers at all in the City of New Orleans. Prior to that time, while they always had significant numbers of blacks living in the city, there were very few registered to vote in the City of New Orleans. As that registration began to build, they became, if not a significant force, they nonetheless became a voting group that certainly had extended. So the politics from a racial standpoint became more liberal. Morrison in 1948 also, while he was

a progressive reform-minded mayor, nonetheless, was an excellent politician. He believed very strongly in the Ward-Precinct system which he had come up through. Not because he came up as a member of that system, but nonetheless he had watched it work and he believed in it. He aligned himself with incumbent office holders; ward leaders traditionally had department head jobs, Clerks of Court, some of the Parochial Officers. He had an organization known as the CCDA, ~~which was the~~ , ~~He~~ actively participated in every election, *with* candidates across the board, that kind of machine politics. I would say that that system lasted until Mascero came into office. The first big change, I think, really came in 1962, when Eddie Duponche who is now a state senator, and was at that time a state senator, ran for Mayor. I ran on that ticket also as a Councilman at large. We lost the election in the run-off with the racial issue being the predominant issue. Heretofore you have to bear in mind that although race had been raised as an issue, Morrison had won four straight elections with people saying, that were advocates for the blacks. But he hadn't gotten elected on the black vote. Chuck first got elected when there were virtually no black votes in the city. He got elected by white votes and the black registration began to build up and

because he was moderate on the subject in terms of those days, in terms of perspective of that era. The black vote always was with Chuck Morrison. So, he was the incumbent and that is the way it lasted for sixteen years. Two years . . . a year prior to the end of his terms, which would have been the fifteenth year of this administration he became Ambassador for the American States and the City Council then had to select the Mayor from one of the two Councilmen at large and they selected Vick Scuro, and he had to run the following year. But he was running then as an incumbent not having been elected now. When Adrian and I ran, Vick Scuro was one of the principal opponents and we got to the second primary with him and we had gotten all of the black vote or at least a significant portion of the black vote, and he proceeded to say, you know, "Go against the old southern block voting." That issue was raised in that campaign and we lost. So, we went through the next eight years of the Scuro administration. It was sort of a conservative regime. Then I ran and won with maybe 95% of the black vote.

J.B.: This was what year?

Landreau: This was 1970. I won, and politics then changed very radically in this city. Because for the first time a candidate openly solicited, met with, discussed

black votes in an openly, publicly, televised and a dramatic change in the political forces in the city. I think it became evident that no one would ever win an election in this city again based on race, and of course, I just ran for re-election again and was elected. There really wasn't a great deal of opposition. I don't mean that to be sounding self-serving, but it is just the way the political thing developed, no major candidates qualified. I had three opponents, but they really didn't make any great effort at it and weren't terribly serious candidates.

J.B.: Was the Voting Rights Act of 1965 a significant factor in this change? Did that result in a considerable increase in stimulating the black vote and black recognition?

Landreau: My recollection is that it did, but not as significant as many people thought. As I recall we had about 35,000 registered voters, registered black voters out of maybe 210,000 in 1962. But black registration was increasing all the time. I think there are about 80,000 now. While a sizeable portion of that increase could be attributable to the Voting Rights Act, I think much of it is also attributed to the changing state administration. The state administration got more liberal; therefore, the registered voters became more liberal and they weren't discouraging blacks from registering. As we got more liberal politicians in office, those who were enjoying a certain

rapport with the black community and support, there wasn't what had been before, a most unified effort to prevent blacks from voting and from registering. But I would have to say that it accounted, the Voting Rights Act accounted for a significant change.

W.D.: *there were* three periods since World War II. The close connection between the state politics and city politics to 1946, then, in a sense, kind of the Morrison Machine politics during the thrust of his administration. Then, a breaking away from that, say, since Scuro.

Landreau: Well, Scuro really didn't have the capacity, I don't want to be quoted, but he just didn't have the capacity to hold together a machine. He could never elect anybody. He got elected himself very successfully all the time, but each election he won each time by a half breath himself. Then the moment he got elected, he then had no power whatsoever to elect anyone else in off-elections, even if they were running with him. He somehow would win, almost miraculously in many peoples view.

W.D.: But did the white political organizations, in a sense, break down during that period?

Landreau: The white political organizations, I think, had been weakening all along. The old regulars, insofar as the city politics were concerned, were getting weaker and

weaker. They were at the strongest during the Mastry years, right before Morrison came into office. When Morrison came in he dominated the scene for 16 years. So, whatever patronage the other political organizations had they would have to get through the state. There were only two predominant political organizations in the city, the old regulars and the Morrison forces, the CCVA. But, he beat them so badly in the mayoralty elections, and they had no entre at City Hall so they existed basically on patronage, and if they didn't have the Governor, they didn't have anything. Inevitably they ended up with the Governor. But I think the economy had as much to do with breaking down that system too. At one time political jobs in the South were sought after. In many instances now, the pay is not very attractive. Everything was under Civil Service. The pay scale is not as attractive as it is in private enterprise, so that we actively solicit employees. We are out in the labor market trying to get the people to come to work for the government, advertising. For instance, there was a time, I guess several years ago, we found it virtually impossible to hire policemen or firemen. The pay scale was so bad that you just couldn't hire anybody to come to work for the city. Contrast that with the early forties, before Civil Service and when the pay was pretty good and the work very light. You really had to know a

precinct captain or a ward leader to get a job and you did it because you were favorable to the administration. So with the improvement, I should say the entrenchment of Civil Service, the economy changing, people getting better education, more job opportunities outside of government, he ended up with a gradual break down of the political organization and the political structure. Today, you know, if you look at the structure here around city hall, it is just very highly professionalized. My feeling was that the old ward system just couldn't work any longer. It isn't that I don't appreciate a good politician, it is just that ward leaders had nothing to hold a group together with. He had no jobs, or if he did have jobs, the job holders were so independent that commanded very little loyalty.

W.D.: Well, while this was happening in white politics the reverse was happening in . . .

Landreau: That is absolutely true. Blacks who had been out of the system then began to get into the system. They got into the system in very very minor numbers prior to our administration. To the best of my knowledge Chuck had no blacks working in the administration. When I say he was a moderate, it was more an expression of doing separate but equal. Before, it was separate but unequal. During Chuck's years, Chuck at least tried to build black

playgrounds and black swimming pools and began to share some of the city's revenues with the blacks. Looking back at that, you know, in the terms of today's perspective, you say, "My God, how backward can you be? How conservative can you get?" But that was frankly, a moderate position. Most moderate in the entire state by far. I think Chuck would have done a great deal more. In other words, I think philosophically he was more liberal on the racial issue than his record would indicate simply because he always wanted to run for Governor, which he did do three times, and knew quite well that one of his major handicaps was that he was looked upon as a racial liberal in this state. Well, you can fairly well understand that if you are running against a Jimmy Davis kind of state-wide candidates who just traditionally ran against blacks. You know, just ran against the old southern way of life and against integration. That was the battle cry in this state as it has been in every southern state for any successful office seeker.

W.D.: As you look down the road, will the power of the organized black groups continue to grow?

Landreau: No.

W.D.: Are they at a peak now?

Landreau: Well, I would have to go back just a little bit. There were several black organizations in the city that

were fairly significant politically that were attached to the Morrison group. Perhaps there were some unseen favors that were done that caused that attachment, some philosophical attachment too, because the blacks generally liked Chuck very much, loved him. But they didn't enjoy a great deal of patronage. I would suspect very little. During the Scuro years the same thing was true. He had several black groups attached to him and perhaps did some minor favors for them. But never any public expression in terms of philosophy. In fact, he was always on the stated conservative side. We had as Councilmen, I think I had gotten the Mayor to appoint, sort of got every Councilman who doesn't have any stated patronage, but at least you've got a little muscle with the Mayor and say, "I'd like you to appoint this guy to the board for me if you could." When Tom Scuro's administration was finished I think there were three blacks serving on boards and commissions across the city. One on the Parkway Commission, one on the Planning Commission, and one in the Civil Service Commission. I had gotten two of those blacks appointed, and another friend of mine, Councilman Ciasio was instrumental in getting another one. But those are the only three that have ever served in any position in government on any board or commission, ever in this city. He had only one black that was working as an

aide to the Mayor. It was a minor job at about \$600 per month. When I got elected, having run on a platform of equality and openness . . .

J.B.: Did you have a campaign theme as such?

Landreau: I guess you could say we ran on a slogan, "The man who tells the truth, wins." But I went on television and said that I proposed to appoint blacks to departments and that I hated racial prejudices and that I proposed to open this city up for everybody and give everybody equal opportunity. We have. We began to bring blacks into the administration in large numbers. Three Department heads, counting Model City, that would be four, I think we have five Deputy Department Heads, members of boards and commissions in significant numbers, and we've done fairly well, even though a lot of the boards are staggered and it takes time, we've done well and we've moved employment up from . . . almost to where it is equal to, fairly close to being equal right now to the population ratios, certainly greater than the voting ratios. A lot of those people came from the political organizations. Blacks in the political organizations are generally far better educated than their counterparts in the white political organizations of several years earlier. Virtually every one is a college graduate, some with Masters degrees,

the kind of individual that would not have participated in the white political structure because they didn't need it. They were lawyers, they were otherwise employed, white lawyers and doctors and businessmen; they didn't need the political system. They were out making money in private enterprise. But the young black professional correctly saw the political system as a way into the mainstream of American life. Part of the problem was, okay, so you want to bring blacks in, but who are they? When you and I grew up, you've got white friends, and this friend has friends and you end up identifying with a great many people who you would ultimately bring into the administration. But when you think in terms of bringing blacks in, you start numbering them and you run out of numbers very quickly. The political organization provided that kind of input. Of course, their strength, the more patrons they got, the stronger the political organizations looked and became. But patronage ultimately will kill anything. Success will kill anything. In some instances, I think, their strength has been greatly exaggerated. The press, you know, something new, it was bold, so the press began to accord great political powers to several black organizations.

J.B.: Do you think they have peaked in terms of political power? And in influence?

Landreau: Yes.

J.B.: I've heard this comment since I have been here that a lot of the political organizations of blacks don't particularly like you and the reason is that you have so, as I understand it, you have so fulfilled your promise in bringing blacks into the administration that the black who is not in the political organization no longer feels it necessary to go through them. He feels that they have more direct access and this has sort of cut off their power and their resentment by it. There is some anger at your administration, or at least frustration, is that . . .

Landreau: I would think that that is partially true. It is difficult to say why people get angry with you. In some instances it is because they feel that we haven't done enough. In the demand for instant change, equality now, which of course, is an impossibility when you are dealing with a structure. If you were starting from scratch, you could do it. You start with a structure of government where you've got 10,000 people, and let us assume that 9,000 of them are white. Well, if you wanted to establish equality instantly, how do you do it. You've got to get rid of "X" number of people that you don't have the right to get rid of to start with. So you have to wait for a certain to take place before that can be done. So, there are some

who have felt that we hadn't moved fast enough and some whose demands were totally unreasonable, unrealistic.

J.B.: What, for example, would you consider an unrealistic request?

Landreau: Expectation of, for instance, taking a board and commission. Say you have eleven guys on a board and they are all white. They expect you to change that board to make it six black, say it is twelve, make it six black and six white instantly. There is no way. Where you have got overlapping terms. That kind of thing. In other words, explanation, they aren't satisfied with the explanation, "Well, gee, it can't happen. I have to go with the vacancies." Because to argue that the system doesn't permit it is an argument that they won't accept. I say they, I don't mean to use that in broad terms, but some won't accept, because they don't accept the system to start with. The system has always worked against them. Let's use the argument that the system prevents the change to the system, which means to change the state Constitution in many instances. Police Department, you start off with 1,500 uniformed offices and let's say we've got 100 blacks. I would like to see the Police Department representative of the community.

J.B.: What is the percentage of the black population in New Orleans?

Landreau: Fifty percent. But a lot of that is young, you know, a lot of children are involved in that. When you start measuring that stuff, your voting strength is about 35%, maybe a little less. So the black population is very young in comparison to the white, and the political clout is not equal to the population base because of the gap in the registration. In other words, the demand that one half of the Police Department be black over night. I mean, it is something that we have been working on for three and a half years, I mean daily, and have a difficult time getting. First of all you can't get the black officers to apply. Initially you couldn't because police work was not attractive to them. It was "Kill the pigs," anybody who was a cop was bad. Then you have to wrestle the Civil Service who says, "We don't care whether a guy is black or white because we are color blind and adhere to standards." And we are saying, "It's not going to work. We need an affirmative program. If you could all of a sudden make everybody equal out there in education, and in health, if you brought on one white and one black, it would take you forever to do it that way. You've got to begin to twist the rules. Well, the lack of understanding that that system has to be changed, help us change the system, we agree with you." So, some of the anger came from that too. Others think that I am just hard-nosed. I know what I want to do.

I think I have got us a deeper commitment to racial equality as any black man or any brown man out there. I think moreso. Mine is a deeply felt philosophy. Some black leadership out there is more personal. They say, "Help blacks," but what they mean is help me as a politician, which they are right. They are casting a dual role. I've said this many times to them, privately and publicly, that the black today has a terrible burden. Yet, at the same time, must be accorded the right of every white politician to enjoy a certain amount of the fruits of the . . . you know, that the political system offers. But also, you know, has to be concerned about blacks generally getting into the system. What does a black political leader do in the way of patronage? Does he accept the job for himself? If he is an architect, does he accept a contract for himself? If he is an attorney, does he take an attorneyship for himself? If he does that, how then does he, you know, satisfy the rank and file of the organization.

W.D.: Can we get back to the role of the black political organizations? More and more people say that to understand politics in this city of the future that you now have to understand the role of black political organizations. That is the first assumption. The second one is that they are becoming more powerful, and this is the first time we have heard them becoming less powerful. Thirdly, when you look

at it in terms of the state politician, the further away you get from New Orleans, the more powerful the black organized groups appear to be. Do you understand what I am saying? For many people thinking of state-wide offices *you need* the coalition to win, the power of the black organized groups in this city becomes critical. They see that role as extremely critical and very powerful. Yet, you say that they may have peaked, but because of the lack of the patronage thing, that they may be going down hill.

Landreau: No. I am saying that they never were terribly powerful, and that they are going down hill.

W.D.: But do you agree that the perceptions of many politicians are that?

Landreau: Media has created a lot of that.

J.B.: But are you also saying that your appeal to the black vote is by going, in effect, above the organization?

Landreau: Unquestionably. Don't misunderstand me. I enjoy the support of those organizations. I hope to have their support and I want their support.

W.D.: Well, you are saying media is doing the same thing to the blacks that it did to the whites in terms of political organization, strength of political organizations, along with the patronage?

Landreau: Well, let me give you an example. For instance, everybody thought the CCDA was so strong, Chuck Morrison was Mayor. I knew that the day that I got into politics that the CCDA . . .

J.B.: What is the CCDA?

Landreau: The Crescent City Democratic Association. I knew the day that I got into politics that the CCDA was a paper tiger. But yet the news media would write, "The powerful CCDA. Morrison's, you know, strong political machine." I came in, as I said, on the tail end of the Morrison years, and I had listened to all of this going on, "the powerful CCDA, fantastic machine." I first ran in 1960 for the house of representatives and I went door to door. I didn't know anybody in politics. I really didn't think I had a chance on earth of winning for the legislature. But I knew that I had to get started somewhere and I was ambitious and enthusiastic and energetic so I began door to door. Naturally, I'd knock on a precinct captain's house. I would introduce myself and he'd say "I am so so, Chuck Morrison's fifteenth precinct captain. It's nice to meet you sir," he would hope that I would do well, and that he couldn't be with me because he would have his candidate and maybe the next time and he'd wish me luck. So, I'd ask him who would live next door. In some instances, they wouldn't know who lived next door or who lived across

the street. Or better yet, if I went next door I'd ask a question or three houses down if I'd ask the man the name of the man . . . I wasn't being cute, sometimes I didn't catch the name and I wanted to make sure I'd remember the name, so I'd ask the neighbor, and he would say, "I don't know him." Then, as I, as luck would have it, I ended up getting Morrison's endorsement because there was a little fight that broke out within the organization and one guy wouldn't pick one candidate and another guy wouldn't take another one so I ended up getting the endorsement. So, I got to see the thing from the inside. I am going around knocking on doors, I don't see any evidence of any precinct captain. I mean, they are doing nothing. I go talk to the ward leader. I'd say, "Look, let's get out there and get some work done and have some meetings," and he'd say "I know all about that. We control that precinct, we control this precinct." Well, I never did understand how they controlled that precinct. Well, I know how they controlled the precinct, because Chuck Morrison put the votes in the box. He didn't need any of them. He didn't need any precinct Captain. He was running with the popularity that is astounding everybody. He just needed somebody to open the voting machine. Just open them up and get out of his way. He was going to put

the votes in the box. So the organization's strength was greatly greatly exaggerated. This, to an extent, is true of the black organizations. It is true of all political organizations. How much do you add to a candidate as a political organization? You get people to vote for you. The candidate has to do something. The candidate has to be given credit for getting some votes. People are more independent. They aren't dependent on political jobs. You know, their father is not on the Police Department by will of the Mayor, their brother is not in his job by the will of the ward boss. Through the Civil Service Merit system, most of the, you will find, the job holders are against the incumbent administration anyway. Unionism is growing. There is dissatisfaction throughout the United States in public service employment. Nobody really likes the boss that much. If the boss is doing a good job in terms of seeing that everybody does a full day's work . . . So, that, I think, is partly responsible for the image of strength that many of the organizations have.

J.B.: Was your father active in politics?

Landreau: No.

J.B.: He did what?

Landreau: He worked for New Orleans Public Service as a power house operator, which would have been equivalent, if I can best describe it to you, as a Motorman. You know, a

bus driver. But he was in a power division, a blue collar worker.

J.B.: You traditionally have run strong in blue collar districts?

Landreau: No.

J.B.: You have not?

Landreau: No. I have run well in the uppers and the blacks.

J.B.: Do you see the potential of someone putting together this old Populists dream of blue collar whites and blacks?

Landreau: It has been done. Jim Garrison did it.

W.D.: How about moving to the state level. Some people argue now that with Edwards election, that was basically a coalition of blacks. That now the power is shifting from the North to the South on the state-wide level because of the election of many state-wide officials from the South? Did that happen? Is it going to continue to happen?

Landreau: Yeah. I think . . . I don't find that . . . I don't know that coalition is the right word for it. Coalition, somehow or another, assumes that people do it by will. You know, let us get together a coalition and therefore we will elect our candidate. I have done that on the city level with people. Put them together by will. I don't mean that I put them together by my will, but have

shown the groups that are better off working together and then we can achieve something. But I think that a person can appeal to those two constituencies. I don't find that terribly inconsistent in terms of today's politics. Many guys, Garrison being the most outstanding example, would manage to get black votes and blue collar whites. Although those are the two groups that are most philosophically opposed to one another, I think that opposition has diminished substantially. I think there is an acceptance today of the rights of blacks to vote, to hold jobs, decent housing and all of those things. I don't think you find in this city the kind of racial prejudices that reflect a resentment; the resentment that I find out there against me in the white community, and I don't think it's sizeable, is that . . . that's all I think about. You know, that I have given the whole city to the blacks. In other words, it isn't a resentment that a black has gotten a job, or that I have advanced a black candidate, therefore I am for integration. I think that it is way beyond that point. Way way beyond that point. <sup>is gone</sup> The day when white politicians, before my time, ~~w~~ouldn't be caught dead shaking a black man's hand in public. It was something that you couldn't do. I thank God that the day I started running that I would never do that. I just went over and would speak my mind about race since 1960 way before I think anybody else was even thinking

about it, and I was just fortunate enough to get elected.

J.B.: I think there was a time when you had a lonely vote ?

Landreau: Yeah. But, you know, we are way beyond that point.

J.B.: What happened that time in the legislature exactly?

Landreau: Well, that has been highly dramatized too. Jimmy Davis, the federal courts had finally drawn the line and ordered the schools to desegregate and after all the appeals and after everything had run out, Funk said, "Okay, in December when these schools open in September, you'll integrate." The Governor called a special legislative session. We used our theories of inter-position, interposing himself, you know, and he took over the school system and the legislature took it over trying to avoid the federal court order. The legislature really divided itself, the vast majority being for the old southern way of life and segregation, while a few of us, not actively advocating integration. Because at that point, I think, it was unheard of, but of being for the law of the land, you know, abide by the decision. We didn't want to close the school system. The legislation got very bitter and often it ended up with Sam and I being the only two guys left voting on one side, and it just beat

everybody else into the ground.

J.B.: How did you feel at that time?

Landreau: I never thought that I would get elected again. I was convinced that I wouldn't get elected, but I didn't care. It may sound strange to you, but I never thought . . . I thought being elected to the state legislature was the highest thing that I ever dreamed of doing in politics. I had no history in politics. I never assumed that I was going to be Mayor or U. S. Senator or President. I astounded myself by getting elected. Nobody in my family had ever been elected to anything. We had no political power, no money, no nothing. I really enjoyed it. I loved the job. I went through that first session and after I got elected, I naturally began to think that I had a bright political future ahead of me. I was only 29 years old and plunk, that session hit, and it was one of those crises of conscience that you have to have when a man has to decide what he is going to do with himself. I thought about it and it sounds a bit sticky to say it, but went to church and prayed over it, and just decided that I wasn't going to sell myself over it. If that is what I had to do to stay in public office, I just wasn't going to do it. I just did what I had to do and let the devil take the high note. I'd just go practice law or do something else. But I want to get back to this other point in the broad sense because I think

it is very important to understand it. But the attitudes here have significantly changed. If that weren't so, we couldn't have elected an Ed Lombard, who just got elected Clerk of Court here, a young black guy. By him carrying all white precincts in many instances. It gets to be a question of fairness in the white's minds now. What is fair? A significant number of whites apparently thought it was fair to have one black elected official. I don't mean to say that all of them felt that one was all that there should be, but obviously there are a lot of them who feel that three is too much. When segregation was the general philosophy it was . . . [Interruption]

End interview with Mayor Landreau of New Orleans.